



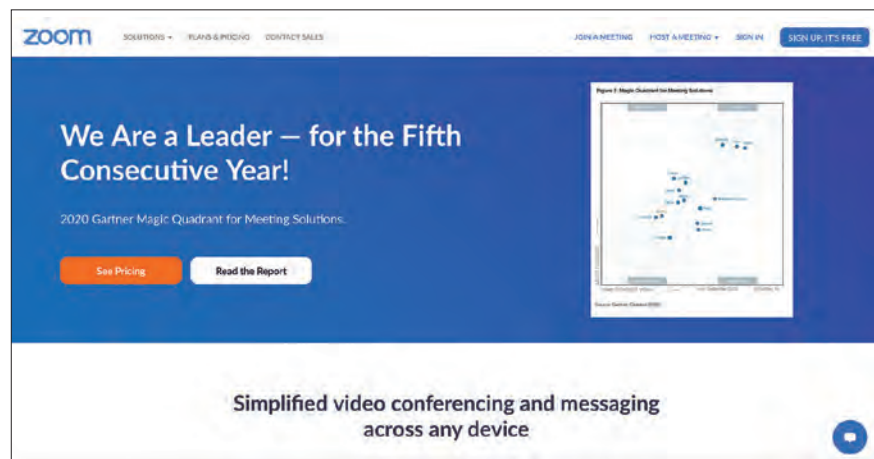
What Genealogists and Societies Have Learned During the Pandemic

George G. Morgan looks at what we've learned and gained from navigating a major health and economic disaster

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC HAS DISRUPTED OUR LIVES FOR WELL over a year and continues in many ways. The disruption unquestionably encompassed many of our genealogical activities. Genealogists and societies have had to adapt to using new tools and strategies. We have learned a great deal and, by necessity, embraced and mastered technologies previously unused or less familiar to continue our research. This article discusses what we and our societies have learned during this stressful time and how new skills have improved our research skills.

Societies Became Virtual

In-person gatherings became impossible, both because of government directives and the fact that our society meeting venues – libraries, churches, meeting halls, restaurants – closed due to restrictions. Societies had to take creative measures to survive and to continue to provide value and services for members.



The ZOOM platform for virtual conferencing quickly became popular during the Pandemic. The free version allows up to 100 people to meet online for 40 minutes.

Some societies had already embraced occasional webinars with remote presenters to broaden their educational program offerings. Some used Skype while others invested in a virtual meeting software platform for these presentations. Suddenly, however, they needed a virtual conferencing platform that was economical, robust, and reliable. While there are a number of these platforms, the one that shot to the top was Zoom. The free version of Zoom allows up to 100 people to meet online for up to 40 minutes. The Pro version

is currently \$149.90 per year for 100 participants up to 30 hours, and an add-on expands to 1,000 participants. Licenses for larger meeting groups are available for very reasonable fees.

You can invite anyone to a Zoom meeting by providing a URL, usually by email, even if your attendees do not have a Zoom account. Once the invitee clicks on the URL, they will join a virtual room with the rest of the group. Societies began using Zoom for multiple purposes:

- **Board Meetings – Officers and directors** could meet to discuss business and operations, and to plan meetings, presentations, and facilitate projects.
- **General Meetings – Societies** replaced their discontinued face-to-face general meetings with virtual meetings. Members were sent an email invitation with the date, time, URL, and other pertinent information. (A handout may also be attached to the email.) Again, once the invited member clicks on the URL, they will join a virtual room where the meeting will take place. They can participate from home or anywhere they have access to a computer and the invitation URL.
- **Invitees can participate** by listening to audio only or by using both their video cameras and computer speakers or a headset to listen to the audio. Video cams allow participants to see one another. Participants are typically muted, but can type questions for response.